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ABSTRACT

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO HAWAIIAN CREOLE-SPEAKING CHILDREN

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Abstract

In order to discover the linguistic competence of Hawaiian kindergarten children, tape recordings of their speech were collected, both openly and surreptitiously, in a wide variety of circumstances, including at home, at play, at school, and in formal situations. An analysis of the data reveals that the children command a wide range of linguistic skills. This competence is generally overlooked or not completely understood by local eduators, and is consequently not taken advantage of by the local teachers in their attempts to teach Hawaiian Creole-speaking children English.

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO HAWAIIAN CREOLE-SPEAKING CHILDREN

Richard R. Day

Minority groups in America whose primary speech codes are not Standard American English (SAE) have been, in recent years, the object of study by any number of scientifically-oriented academicans, including anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and linguists. Among the various reasons for studying these groups is an attempt to discover why the children of the minority groups tend to be "low" or "under" achievers in the formal educational system. Generally, investigations which are addressed to this issue start from one of three hypotheses.

One of these hypotheses is that members of these diverse (i. e. non-standard) speech communities are genetically inferior to persons belonging to SAE-speaking communities. Thus, for example, the failure of black children in America to "achieve" in the school setting is merely a reflection of racial defeciencies in intelligence and cognitive development. Supports of this heredity theory conveniently overlook, however, the large numbers of blacks who can be quite easily classified as "achievers", both in and out of public schools, by any number of different criteria.

A second hypothesis, which is quite different from the heredity-based one, claims that the failure to do well in school stems from

deficiencies in the environment of these different groups. This environment-deficit hypothesis holds that children who are not speakers of SAE are generally from low socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the factors which prevent cognitive and intellectual development must come from the debilitating environment of lower class life. Supporters of this line of thinking, while often criticizing the hypothesis described above, have claimed that children from ghettos have no culture.

Rather than going into the rather substantial weaknesses and inadequacies of both of these positions, I would like to discuss a third, one which seems to be receiving more and more prominence. This hypothesis explains the academic difficulties in terms of differences between the culture of the minority groups and the white middle class culture. These researchers, for example, attempt to explain the low scholastic achievement records of black children by claiming that black culture is substantially different from white culture. The black child has a different value system, different ways of learning, and different ways of dealing with stress situations. Such differences could be responsible for the differences in school performance between black and white children.

Further, if we take into account in some fashion the close relationship between language and culture, we could claim that the structural differences between the black child's language, Black Vernacular English, and the English of the middle class schools

could be the cause of the black child's failure to learn to read properly. That is, the language differences between the minority groups and those who speak some form of SAE are what makes it difficult for the minority group child to "succeed" in the public school system.

In Hawaii, we find that Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children--who speak Hawaiian Creole (HC)--are often characterized as under-achievers in the public school system. Although not overtly expressed by educators in Hawaii, perhaps a small percentage feel that this is due to the first position outlined above--genetics. This belief is manifested in such statements as "I hard-head." This was expressed by a ten year-old Hawaiian boy who was explaining his situation in school. Regardless of his source of information, it remains that this type of thinking is not uncommon in Hawaii.

Others, either consciously or not, subscribe to the environment-deficit theory. It is not unsual to hear remarks to the effect that the Hawaiian child lacks a proper home environment, that he does not have any meaningful verbal experiences in the home before entering school, or, to an ever greater extreme, that the Hawaiians have lost their culture, and that one of the reasons that Hawaiian children fail in school is that they simply do not have any culture.

I should point out that remarks such as these are not restricted to unenlightened laymen, but have been expressed by persons with responsible positions in the public school system.

More recently, however, those concerned with education in Hawaii have come to feel that there are differences between the culture of contemporary Hawaiians and the cultural norms on which the system of formal education is based. It is felt that it is such differences between the Hawaiian's own cultural orientation and school expectations which could be the cause of the Hawaiian child's poor academic record. It can be further argued that such differences might possibly be reflected in the speech of this particular minority group.

There has been some discussion in the literature over the years about the nature of the speech spoken by many of the local-born people in Hawaii. Reinecke (1969) believed that local speech was best represented by a "language mastery continuum" which ranged from immigrant speech to what we could call today a dialect of English. Tsuzaki (1971) posited three different languages--Hawaiian Pidgin English, Hawaiian Creole English, and a Hawaiian dialect of English--which co-exist and in some manner overlap. Day (1972) claimed that the English language scene is best represented by a post-creole speech continuum, similar to what DeCamp

(1971) posited for Jamaica. That is, we no longer have a creole language, but a situation in which there are a number of different systems which are decreolizing or moving in the direction and under the influence of SAE.

Regardless of what label one attaches to the speech of certain segments of the population in Hawaii, most observers would agree that there are ways of speaking which cannot be classified as SAE. For a long time, one of the standard operating procedures of the State Department of Education was to eradicate "Pidgin", as it is popularly called, from the speech of local children. All attempts have been, at best, unsuccessful, and in the past few years there has been a shift in policy. A recent draft from the Department of Education which attempts to provide the early childhood teacher with specific guidelines states:

> Language is a very personal thing and a child can sense when others maintain a derogatory attitude towards his oral language. This results in lessening his motivation to speak; hence it diminishes chances for improvement. To rid the child of sub-standard English, should <u>not</u> be the target for instruction.[3]

So here we see an apparent awareness of the complexity of the issue; merely legislating HC out of existence and attaching derogatory labels to it will achieve negative results, at best. However, note that within this framework of the recognition of

language differences, not deficiencies, there is a hint of condescension in the passage quoted above in the words "chances for improvement" and "sub-standard". This condescension is not a mistake, for immediately preceding this passage we find the following:

> Language-deficient children generally have not heard such syntactical structures directed to them to which they must respond. Patterned drills planned specifically for a particular hard-core deficiency can be an effective supplement. [4]

Instead of the language-differences assumption, there is the language-deficiencies hypothesis! I find this particularly disappointing in light of the awareness hinted at in the first quotation above. This points to a lack of a grasp of the intricacies of the situation: Differences between cultural groups are recognized but are thought to be deficiencies on the part of the nondominant groups. These deficiencies, which evidently can be arranged into a hierarchy from least desirable (i. e. "hard-core") to presumably those which are easier to deal with, represent gaps in the minority child, gaps which must be filled with the right information and knowledge.

This combining the different with the deficient is apparently deliberate. In the draft quoted above, there is a section on teaching strategies in which two major traditional approaches are described. The first approach, the patterned drill, "is used in

many programs for the disadvantaged, immigrant, or language-deficient." The other is called a "natural" approach, and is supposed to take advantage of the child's natural capacity for acquiring language. The proposed approach which the draft recommends is:

> The teaching approach recommended is a combination of the "NATURAL" APPROACH with a SYSTEMATIC PLAN based on (1) the developmental stages of logic and (2) how syntactical forms emerge. This approach extensively uses MODELING and ELICITING RESPONSE TECHNIQUES during free play periods, spontaneous, self-directed activities, informal and formal instructional periods. It is supplemented by a modified patterned drill approach, as needed.*
>
> *A source of the patterned drill approach readily available in Hawaii is Teaching Standard English as a Second Dialect, Hawaii District Office, Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 1969.[5]

That is, if the child is unable to learn the "natural" way, then we should have a supplemental program (which is in some way "unnatural"?).

Let us examine the supplemental patterned drill approach. These materials were developed to aid students in learning SAE, and are the result of a four-year research project conducted in a primarily Hawaiian community on the island of Hawaii. Two of the underlying assumptions are as follows:

> a. Hawaii Islands Dialect (HID) is a respectable, useful tool of communication for its speakers. But because it has a limited range of coverage and usefulness in terms

> of educational, social, and economic considerations, those who speak HID exclusively need to learn to speak Standard English (SE) as well.
>
> b. Because instruction in our schools is done in SE and those students who are not familiar with or have not developed some facility with SE are at a distinct disadvantage, early education of those students must focus on the development of skills in the use of SE.[6]

Further on, under basic assumptions about the teacher, we read:

> ...the teacher serves as a good listener and a SE speaker. She listens to the children and herself; she attends to and cares about what is being said and how it is being said. Her attitude toward usage and pronunciation is neither puristic nor "anything goes." Her attitude toward the dialect spoken by the children is not one of scorn but respect. Her intention is not to eradicate the dialect but to add to the children's store of language skills.[7]

There seems to be a contradiction here. How can a conscientious teacher treat with "respect" a form of communication used by her children which "has a limited range of coverage and usefulness in terms of educational, social, and economic considerations"? Wouldn't the teacher be doing her pupils a great disservice by treating with respect something which will hinder their economic, social, and educational progress?

In this program of instruction in SE, there are such exercises as:[8]

	A:	B:
1.	Is she feeding the horse?	Yes, she's feeding the horse.
	he washing cow?	No, he's not washing the cow.
	patting dog?	(etc.)
	holding cat?	
	bird?	

2. I'm not going anywhere.
   He's to the store.
   We're park.
   She's beach.
   They're party.

3. Are they riding to school?
   we walking
   you skipping
   running

4. She isn't jumping on the porch.
   He running in the yard.
   It playing
   yelling

5. Is the farmer milking the cow?
   cleaning the barn?
   driving his tractor?
   plowing his field?
   wearing a robe?
   (Change to negative declarative.)

The targets of these particular exercises are the interrogative present progressive, the negative declarative present progressive, and the infinitive. It should be pointed out that this lesson is taken from the third level, or year; prior to this level, students have had two years of daily exercises, and, at the end of this level, they will have another year's work before completing the program.

In order to discover if such programs were really needed by children whose vernacular is some form of Hawaiian Creole, an investigation was initiated into the speech of Hawaiian children living in a relatively low socio-economic district in Honolulu.[9]

The object was to discover the linguistic competence of such children in a wide variety of circumstances. In an effort to keep the investigation to a manageable size, it was decided to try to get samples of speech from ten children; this was later reduced to six because of circumstances beyond our control.

It has been reported in the literature (cf. Labov 1969, Day 1972) that speakers of a nonstandard code often shift unpredictably and randomly when they attempt to produce a supposedly more standard or prestigious variety. Such shifting may occur (but is not restricted to occuring) when the two codes--the standard and the nonstandard--come into contact in society. The result of this phenomenon would be that an investigator, speaking a variety of the standard code, routinely asking an informant about his non-standard speech might or might not end up with the desired samples of speech--the nonstandard. In order to avoid this, we attempted to obtain speech in naturally-occurring settings.

One major way this was accomplished was through the use of the mothers of our subjects. We felt it would be distinctly unnatural for an adult stranger to enter a child's house and attempt to tape record his or her speech. It would be more natural to have someone already in the household try to obtain recordings of speech in its social context. To achieve this, the mothers, who

were randomly recruited from a neighborhood welfare program with the one criterion being that they have one child of kindergarten age, were given a six-week seminar-type course of instruction. This course dealt with ways of obtaining speech in its social context, the social uses of language, origins and nature of Hawaiian Creole, and other relevant topics. These six mothers, all of whom had received limited formal education, were very receptive to the ideas and concepts, apparently understood what we were after and why, and seemed to enjoy the experience. The result of the training program was that each mother was given a Sony TC-110-A tape recorder with the assignment of recording, in whatever manner she perceived best, two or more sixty-minute cassettes of her child's vernacular. Upon turning in a recorded tape, each mother received a modest payment for her efforts. (In addition, the mothers were given baby-sitting money for the six two-hour weekly meetings.)

The quality of the recordings of the tapes which the mothers gave us ranged from very good to very poor. When the latter were turned in, we requested that an additional recording be made. Recordings were made in bedrooms, living rooms, bathrooms, riding in cars, and at the dining table. The amount of speech of the subjects was also variable--quite a lot to very little. Again, if the subject did not speak a lot on the tapes, the mother was

requested to try again. We did end up with an adequate amount of speech from each subject.

We quickly discovered that the tapes would be impossible to transcribe without the assistance of the mothers. When asked to help us in transcribing, all the mothers agreed. Two of the mothers transcribed tapes without assistance; the others went over the tapes with us. They were paid for this additional work.

In addition to the home situation, we also obtained tape recordings of the children at school and in a very formal interview situation. With the help of very cooperative teachers, we were able to plant microphones around the various kindergarten classrooms in order to get recordings of the children interacting with their peers and with the teachers. The formal interview situation was held in the offices of the Kamehameha Early Education Project. Each subject was brought to the building and was told that he or she was to be interviewed. We wanted the child to view the situation as a formal one in order to have a sample of speech in such a circumstance.

The speech of each child was analyzed for negative formation, question formation, present and past tense, occurrences of the copula, plural formation, and definite and indefinite articles. These features were chosen because they represent areas of the grammar which are thought to be rather different from SAE. For

example, the following sentence illustrates a negative yes-no question, present tense:

(1) J: Why, you guys no eat lunch ? (L42-1--195/7)

"Why, aren't you guys eating lunch?

The results of this investigation are not yet completely final, but preliminary indications are that the six subjects command a much wider range of linguistic skills than we had anticipated. The children certainly could not be labelled as "language-deficient." The subjects, while making use of the features of HC which we had expected, also had a great deal of SAE features in their speech. For example, the following passage is from the same child quoted in (1):

(2) J: Uh, uh. Uh, uh. Yeah. You jus' wen watch,

"Yeah. You just watched,

yeah. He sti' yet gon his class. If he flop

didn't you. He is still continuing to go to his

down, cannot--he doesn't sti' yet come his

class. If he fails, cannot--he doesn't continue

school, yeah. (L42-1--184/7)

to go to school."

This was addressed to his sister and an aunt who were talking about who goes where in school. Note the use of the HC past tense marker wen before watch; sti' is another HC aspectual marker.

However, there is doesn't in the last sentence! doesn't is not usually regarded as HC in nature. We saw in (1) how no was used to form the present tense negative. This is not an isolated example, unique to this child in this situation. It can be duplicated over and over. One can only conclude that the children we studied used many SAE features, and that their primary code does not consist only of HC features.

In addition, we also discovered that the subjects are well aware of the speech of others around them. This discovery came about through an examination of the children's ability to role-play, using appropriate linguistic codes for the roles involved in the appropriate situations. For example, a young girl imitating her teacher would not only use the appropriate vocabulary items but would also produce with amazing accuracy a teacher's tone, syntax, and pronunciation. This, incidentally, casts doubt on the findings of those who have claimed that children in this age bracket have little ability to role-play. Piaget, for example, in his writings, claimed that children below the age of 7 or 8 have little, if any, role-taking capabilities. Work done by Flavell and his associates (Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, Javris 1968), in a small pilot study of preschool children, indicates that there is a continuum of role-taking skills which children acquire as they mature. They discovered three such skills which children about six years of age

possess and only a few three year-olds had. Our evidence, based on an extremely small number of children, seems to indicate that five year-olds most likely have more of these role-taking capabilities than they are usually given credit for. Our work, of course, is at best only tentative, and much more rigorous investigations are called for before any definite conclusions can be drawn in this fascinating area of study.

We have no reason to believe that our six subjects are radically different from their peers. We feel that they are rather typical representatives. We can, therefore, assume that many, and maybe most, of the children living in the same and similar environments also control a great deal of SAE. The question of where the children acquire this competence is another matter, but it does not seem too far wrong at this point to posit television and radio as the most likely sources. Children are exposed to practically nothing but SAE from these two media, and there is no doubt in my mind that they understand most of what they hear and watch. Be that as it may, it remains that HC-speaking children also demonstrate control over a large number of SAE features.

If what we have claimed eventually is proven to be at least partially accurate, then what does this mean for the programs which teach English as a second dialect (or language), such as the one examined earlier in this paper? One of the major

methodological problems in the field of teaching English as a second (or foreign) language is in finding satisfactory ways of providing the student an opportunity for creative leanguage learning. The oral or audiolingual method fails to give the student any such opportunity. Instead, there are boring practice drills and artifical dialogues to memorize and reproduce. One result of this could be that the students develop negative attitudes toward the target language (in our case, SAE). This might mean that the students do not learn anything at all and might not want to have anything at all to do with the target language! And, as indicated above, perhaps this is all for something which the students in Hawaii do not need anyway!! The child could possibly come out of a program, such as the Keaukaha Oral Language Development, knowing less SAE than he started the program with, and perhaps having negative attitudes about SAE in general. Or, such programs could be attempting to teach the child material which he already has acquired through other means.

We are now in the process of developing a series of tests which can be quickly and easily administered to HC-speaking children of kindergarten age which will give us a fairly good picture of an individual child's linguistic skills, both in HC and SAE. This will enable us to determine whether or not our original findings tentatively presented above are indeed accurate. This will

provide us with a reasonable alternative to repeating the elaborate investigation reported above. Such an investigation would prove impossible, of course, with a whole classroom of kindergarten children.

Our evidence at this time seems to show that what is needed is not a program of teaching English as a second language or dialect but a way, a method, that can somehow take advantage of the SAE skills which we feel these children already possess. Just exactly what such a program would entail we are not ready to speculate on now. Any such a program, though, would have to take into account the existing cultural norms and attitudes about SAE and the learning situation.

This point brings us back to the beginning of the discussion. Simply because our investigation indicates that the language-differences hypothesis is not completely supported by the data does not mean that the claim of cultural differences is wrong and that either the genetic theory or the environmental-deficit theory, or perhaps both, must be correct. It would mean that we have not accurately chosen that aspect of the culture which is responsible for the so-called underachievement of the Hawaiian youth. Indeed, it might turn out to be that the language differences, such as they are, are only one small part of a larger picture, in which cultural differences make up only part of the total scene.

It can be speculated that these other aspects of the culture which might be included in the area which could cause difficulties might include learning basic behavioral skills common to the culture found in the middle class public school system. Or, on the other hand, we might discover that other cultural differences involve attitudes and expectations held by teachers who are the products of the middle class educational system. Part of the answer, then, would be to make such teachers aware of the cultural differences--and similarities--of their HC-speaking students, and to take our teachers one step further by teaching them behavioral skills to work with these students.

In closing, I would like to take notice of the complex issues raised by Sledd 1972 when he points out the racial overtones inherent in a situation where a minority group child is asked to learn the speech of the dominant culture. There is no doubt that Sledd raises some questions which should not be overlooked and which should be thoroughly understood by those in the field of bidialectal education. The situation which faces us in Hawaii, however, is <u>not</u> whether we should education our children in SAE; at this time, such policy decisions are made by top officials of the State Department of Education. Our role as educators, whether we regard ourselves as anthropologists, linguists, or whatever, might best be served by trying to make others understand what Bernstein was trying to

express in the following passage (1970: 57):

> That the culture of subculture through its forms of social integration generates a restricted code, does not mean that the resultant speech and meaning system is linguistically or culturally deprived, that its children have nothing to offer the school, that their imaginings are not significant. It does not mean that we have to teach these children formal grammar, nor does it mean that we have to interfere with their dialect. There is nothing, but nothing, in dialect as such, which prevents a child from internalizing and learning to use universalistic meanings.[10]

NOTES

[1]This is a revised edition of a paper delivered at the 71st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Toronto, Canada, in December 1972.

[2]For a detailed account of the role cultural differences are thought to play in the reading process, see Stewart 1969.

[3]This quotation and the next two are from A Curriculum Guide For Early Education, Ages 3-8, with Emphasis on Ages 3-5, which is produced by Early Childhood Education, General Education Branch, Office of Instructional Services, Department of Education, State of Hawaii, November 1971, Section IV-A, p. 21.

[4]ibid., Section IV-A, p. 21.

[5]ibid., Section IV-A, p. 18.

[6]Teacher's Guide for Teaching Standard English as a Second Dialect to Primary School Children in Hawaii, Keaukaha Oral Language Development Program, Level III, Office of Instructional Services, General Education/Language Arts, Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 1971, p. 1.

[7]ibid., p. 2.

[8]ibid., p. 89.

[9]This investigation was carried out by three members of the Kamehameha Early Education Project: Ms. Violet Mays, Dr. Stephen Boggs, and myself.

[10]My quoting with approval this particular passage of Bernstein's should not be construed as acceptance on my part of his concepts of elaborated and restricted codes. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case.

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